

A
SERMON,

ADDRESSED TO THE
GENERAL BAPTISTS,

ON THE
CAUSES OF THEIR DECLENSION,
AND THE
MEANS OF THEIR FUTURE PROSPERITY.

PREACHED AT THE
BAPTIST MEETING,
St. THOMAS'S STREET, PORTSMOUTH,
November the 15th;

And at CHICHESTER, December the 6th; 1795.

(Now a little enlarged.)

BY JOHN KINGSFORD.

"Be instant in Season, out of Season; reprove, rebuke, exhort with all long suffering and doctrine." II. Tim. iv. 2.

"It is the duty of each of us, Especially those who are in the Ministry to exert ourselves to diffuse the light and influence of the Gospel among our fellow creatures, and the more so, when we consider the prevalency of Infidelity, Irreligion, and Immorality."

General Assembly Circular Letter for 1795.

"We ought to give—earnest heed to the things which we have heard." Heb. ii. 1.

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ST. JOHN'S

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ON THE

CHURCH OF ST. JOHN

AND THE

MEANS OF THEIR FUTURE PROSPERITY.

IN A

BAPTIST MEETING.

BY THOMAS STANLEY, BOSTON.

NEW YORK:

AT THE CHURCH OF ST. JOHN.

(Now published by)

BY JOHN STANLEY.



THE CHURCH OF ST. JOHN, BOSTON, HAS THE HONOR TO ANNOUNCE THAT THE REV. THOMAS STANLEY, D.D., WILL PREACH A SERMON ON THE CHURCH OF ST. JOHN, AND THE MEANS OF THEIR FUTURE PROSPERITY, ON SATURDAY, THE 10TH OF SEPTEMBER, AT TWO O'CLOCK, P.M., IN THE CHURCH OF ST. JOHN.

ADMISSION FREE.

PREFACE

BELOVED IN THE LORD.

YOU are earnestly requested to observe, that, in the following Discourse, I have noticed those Subjects *only* which I conceive are too much neglected: and *only* those parts of the Christian Life, to which, but little attention is paid in comparison of their Importance.

Should any of you ask why I chose such a text, and the reason of my Publishing such things: "My answer to them that do examine me, is this," I chose the text because it Struck my mind; and because I knew not of any one, that contained within itself the leading Heads I wanted to bring forward; and I publish these things, because I deem it best to look an existing evil in the face, that by probing the wound to the bottom, a cure may with Divine assistance be effected.

Some of you may wish to know what is the Number of General Baptists in England. From the best information I have been able to obtain, the number of MEMBERS is about Five Thousand; an exact knowledge of their number, however, is not easily obtained, as, there are some Churches no ways connected with either, the *Kentish*, the *Leicestershire*, or the *Lincolnshire Association*: nor with the GENERAL ASSEMBLY, of which these Associations make a part; and some Churches in connexion have hitherto omitted sending to the Assembly, when requested, an account of their number from the mistaken notion that it looks like David numbering the people; and it is possible some may have neglected it, because they are few, or for some other reason.

It appears from the minutes of one Association, held at Nottingham in 1795, that it is composed of twenty-nine Churches and it contained at that time Two Thousand eight hundred and four members. There are (I am happy to say) Churches in that Association and in other places, in a state of Prosperity; but these are only some exceptions to a General rule; and on Examination I believe it will be found, that *these* Churches are the most prosperous where those Subjects and that Conduct, which I have briefly recommended, are most Zealously pursued. The Efforts of very few persons is in many cases enough to keep up the *form*: but it requires the united exertions of a greater number, to maintain in a Society, the "*Power of Religion*:" so frequently recommended in our Assembly Letters.

In some parts of the Sermon I much wished to enlarge more; but was compelled to restrain myself, or exceed the limits which I had prescribed to my pen; for, not knowing what kind of reception it might meet with in the Churches, I judged it best to bring what I thought to be the necessary particulars into as small a compass as I could,

If I have mistaken the Subject, I hope some friend to truth, will be induced to Publish a more Satisfactory account of our declension; and if in the end the cause of Religion be promoted, no matter by whom, it will give me pleasure, as my principal motive is: a desire to be useful. And as God often "Perfects his Praise out of the mouths of babes and sucklings," I have the pleasing hope that this address may be read and blessed to some precious Souls now; and to others, when—THE AUTHOR IS NO MORE.

A SERMON,

A SERMON, &c.

Eccles. vii. 27.

BEHOLD, THIS HAVE I FOUND,—COUNTING ONE BY ONE, TO FIND OUT THE ACCOUNT.

THAT we may understand the design of Solomon in our text, we must look at the connexion in which the words stand; for our text is not an abstract sentence unconnected as the Proverbs are; the wise man set his “heart to know—to search and to seek knowledge and wisdom” in a particular enquiry, see verse 25. The four succeeding verses give us the result of his labour: “I find more bitter than death, the woman whose heart is snares and nets, and her hands as bands: whoso pleaseth God shall escape from her; but the Sinner shall be taken by her. Behold, this have I found, saith the Preacher, counting one by one, to find out the account; One man among a Thousand have I found; but a woman among all those have I not found; Lo, this only have I found, that God hath made MAN upright, but THEY have sought out many inventions.”

B

By

I. Kings, c. xi.
v. 3.

By the Thousand women, he alludes to his wives and concubines, which amounted to that precise number: and speaking from experience, he found them the occasion of continual perplexity to his soul.

The demands of so many must be very numerous according to their different Tempers and Fancies, and it is highly probable that both Envy and Jealousy taking possession of many of their hearts, multiplied their wants.

This is certain, their demands were not only extravagant but impious, and being beset with their Importunities, Solomon, at Length, yielded to their will.

- v. 7. In proof of this, we read that "He built an High Place for Chemosh the abomination of Moab," that Sacrifices might be offered to an Idol, and to make the Sin the more horrid, "It was built on the Hill that is before Jerusalem;" Here, The Altar of God and the Altar of an Idol were placed, perhaps within sight of each other: which looks like an open defiance of the God of Heaven.

- v. 7. But this one Altar was not all, Another wife worshipped "Molech the abomination of the children of Ammon." He must therefore Please her, and an Altar was built to that Idol. Having once departed from his duty, he knew not where to stop; having v. 8. built Altars for these: he likewise "did the same for all his strange wives." They, not being content with this, he must needs attend the worship paid to these Idols, and we behold him who so solemnly prayed to God at the dedication of the Temple, now

go after "Ashtoreth, the Goddess of the Zidonians, and after Milcom the abomination of the Ammonites." And could SOLOMON be such a fool? The Page of Sacred History, which faithfully records the sins of Kings, informs us thus, and assigns the reason: "For his wives turned away his heart." I. Kings, c. xi. v. 5.
 And what were the consequences of this change? God was angry with him, and Because he had thus done, declared unto him, "I will surely rend the Kingdom from thee, and give it to thy Servant." v. 3. v. 11.

This Righteous denunciation worked upon his Dignity as a MONARCH, and upon his Conscience as a SINNER. This induced him to apply his heart to know, to search, and to seek out wisdom and the reason of things; and to know the wickedness of folly, even of his foolishness and madness." Therefore said he, "I find more bitter than death the woman whose heart is snares and nets." In his enquiries he was led to compare the conduct of the men and women about him, of these last, not one in a Thousand feared God; but "one man among a Thousand I have found." Eccles. c. vii. v. 25. v. 26. v. 28.

Not satisfied with this comparison which decided in favor of the men, and to the disgrace of those who had "turned away his heart" from God, he makes a bolder contrast, and declares the result of his researches to be, in substance, as follows: "The men about me act with propriety in comparison of the women, and more agreeably to the de-

sign of God in the creation, when he made man upright: But women have been the cause of much evil since they were formed; Begin with Eve the first sinner upon Earth, and end with those who have brought me under Guilt before God by their devices, and have also ruined my Kingdom." Or to use his own words in the twenty-ninth verse, which appear to me clearly to convey what I have asserted: "Lo, this only have I found, that God hath made man upright; but they have sought out many inventions." The word THEY in the twenty-ninth verse, applying to the same people as the word THOSE in the twenty-eighth: "One man among a Thousand have I found: But a woman among all those have I not found—God hath made man upright: but they have sought out many inventions"

I once thought the twenty-ninth verse an argument in favor of the Rectitude of human nature; I now believe a more Erroneous conception of Scripture never entered my mind; and confident I am, that if the Doctrines of Christ had no better foundation than that doctrine hath in that verse, *like that* they would deserve to be rejected, as Built on the Sand. Ask what is the scope of the writer? Is it not to Lament the conduct of his wives and concubines, and to express his dislike of it in the strongest terms? and, if I mistake not, you will soon see his conclusion is that THEY abounded in wicked inventions.

Let us never knowingly be Guilty of detaching
sentences

sentences from their connection to serve a turn, for this hurts a good cause, and is but a poor prop to a bad one.

But which way did Solomon come to this conclusion? In the best way possible. It was by, "counting one by one, to find out the account." And though he confesses he could not find it out to perfection; yet he could find enough to warrant a General conclusion, which conclusion he draws in the twenty-ninth verse, and with it, was compelled to be satisfied.

Having shewed the situation in which our text stands; I propose to adopt the METHOD described in it, as the most proper to investigate any important subject: and that I may choose one, which is interesting to us (and our text leaves to us the Privilege of choosing any subject) I will enquire WHAT ARE THE CAUSES WHY RELIGION AMONGST GENERAL BAPTISTS DOES NOT FLOURISH: and in this enquiry, I will, by divine assistance, "count one by one, to find out the account."

Some may ask, But why choose this subject in Preference to every other? I answer, not for its pleasantness to the speaker, nor for its agreeableness to my hearers; but because I have often been asked the question, both by persons in our connexion and out of it.

The question being so Generally asked, supposes the fact to be evident, at least, in some parts of the Kingdom.

Kingdom. This I must acknowledge, and instead of endeavouring to refute the charge which is easy to be proved, I shall labour to ascertain the causes and cast in my mite towards removing of them.

It is not my design to enquire into all the causes as they exist in different societies, Some of these may be very different, and considerable knowledge of existing circumstances is necessary, to form an accurate judgment; therefore, of that society to which a person belongs, he can best say what things "hinder the Gospel of Christ:" yet on account of the Greatness of human Prejudice, and the number of our Imperfections, it is difficult to say, whether a full statement of these things would do most good or harm. While we leave this question unsolved, we may venture to say, it behoves every Individual, to consider well the causes of declension in the Church to which he belongs, and as far as in him lies, to exert himself to the utmost, that they may be removed; for Indifference in Religion is a crime, and he that is not for Christ is against him. If each member can be prevailed upon to act his proper part the most difficult work may soon be done.

My intention is, to assist you by some leading remarks, to account for particular occurrences which are detrimental to Religion; in the same way as you judge from a General Sight of a tree, whether it will bear "Olive berries or Figs."

If

1. Cor. c. ix.
v. 12.

Matt. c. xii.
v. 30.

James c. iii.
v. 12.

If it be asked what I mean, when speaking of Religion, by its FLOURISHING amongst the General Baptists, I answer: The attendance of numbers—The accession of members—and above all, The increase of Godliness in the hearts and lives of those who attend. It *may be* that, but little true Religion exists where great numbers attend: It *must be* acknowledged, that Religion cannot extensively flourish where but few professors are, even suppose every one to be what he professes: an humble follower of the Lamb; and therefore, it is but right to conclude that, where most persons attend amongst Protestant Dissenters, there is most Spiritual Devotion and most Religion.

I say amongst PROTESTANT DISSENTERS, because the comparison would not be fair were we to include the Established Church, which is generally most numerous for many reasons; as—the civil Privileges its members enjoy—Its not depending on contributions for its support, in the way the dissenting cause generally does—and the Pride of the Multitude who have no Religion, and yet warmly profess they belong to the Church, while they habitually indulge in any Immorality. Besides, it is common for people who do not join dissenters to call themselves, and to be called of others, Churchmen.

It has often been said, The reason the General Baptists do not flourish is, 1st. *Their doctrines are not Popular.* But it must be asked how came they to be

be more unpopular than the doctrines of other dissenters?—Those churchmen who are Bigoted condemn all dissenters alike, each one is obnoxious because he is a dissenter.

2dly. Some of my Brethren will say that our Baptizing only Believers, or such as profess to believe and them by Immersion, renders us less attended than other churches; Were this the case, the Particular Baptists would be in the same predicament; but we all know, that they in most places are not.

But then you will reply, that, although on the mode and subject of Baptism, they and we are one; they preach other doctrines which are agreeable to the Church of England, and that accounts for their being better attended—I answer, this will not account for the fact; for though their doctrines be more consonant to the Thirty-nine Articles than ours: Churchmen in General do not so much as know what the Articles of their Church are, and not many of their Ministers enforce all of them, and it may be for the best of reasons: because they do not believe them all.

3dly. It is Generally thought, further, that the doctrines of the Particular Baptists are more pleasing to fallen Man than ours, as they tend to make men indifferent, for, if men cannot be saved unless God hath fixed upon them as the particular objects of his Love; of what use is it to call upon the Lord for Salvation?—And if they cannot be lost if he is determined

determined to save them: may not men act just as they please and yet be safe? Now, allowing to these things all that can be desired, it is not *proved* (however strongly they may countenance the idea) that they are the cause of that difference which exists; Because those Methodists, who oppose these sentiments are yet very numerous, and Generally prosper though despised by the world.

It must be allowed; that where Numbers do attend, others will, because of the many which are there: for *Curiosity* and *Shew* accompany each other; but even this is no reason why "A Little one" should not by degrees "become a Thousand and a small one a strong nation," for Churches have arisen out of obscurity, and those who were "Termed Forsaken" have been "married" to the Lord—he hath delighted in them, and hath caused them to flourish like a "Tree planted by the water side." The *unpopularity* of doctrines is no valid objection, however specious in appearance, to their success, provided they be of God, which we believe ours are: for Pure Religion has ever been unpopular since the fall of man, and will be till Righteousness shall reign on the Earth; But this prevented not the Gospel from gaining ground in the world. "The first propagators of it, successfully combated the policy and power of the Magistrate—the credit and craft of the Priest—the prejudices and passions of the People—the wisdom and pride of the Philosopher"—and if we form ideas

Isai. c. lx.
v. 22.

c. lxii. v. 4.

of divine truth worthy of it, we shall expect it will work its way to the hearts of men by its intrinsic worth, if we use with vigour and perseverance the appointed means, independent of being recommended by the *Great* or the *Many*; for truth is like the diamond, which only requires to be rubbed, and it will shine even in the dark, and in some degree attract the attention of every beholder.

4thly. Were we to ask those who differ from us, the reason we do not prosper, they would readily answer, because our doctrines are not true. To this we reply, that, the reason why the Man who owned the field—Matthew xiii. 44th, was not in the enjoyment of the treasure it contained, was not, because it did not belong to him, but because he neglected to *cultivate that field*. Therefore the Parable was used to stir up the disciples of Christ to diligence and incessant labour in the field of truth, that they might explore its treasure, and impart it to the souls of men, whatever it might cost them; This they did, and were able to say: “We have imparted unto you not the Gospel of God only; but also our own souls because ye were dear unto us.”

As these are NOT the causes of our declension; let us “count one by one to find out” what ARE.

And FIRST, I think it cannot but be supposed, that errors in Religion must be pernicious to the souls of men, and although we all believe in the Necessity of “Repentance towards God and Faith to-

wards

I. Thess. c. 2
v. 8.

ACTS C. XI Verse 2.

wards our Lord Jesus Christ;" and are fully persuaded that Christ "Tasted death for every man;" and while we all look for the "Resurrection of the dead" at the last day, and "Eternal Judgment," and are also, of one mind respecting the right Mode and proper Subject of Baptism; and are confident that the proper subject of Baptism has a full right to the Lord's Supper; Yet when we consider how widely we differ from one another in other things: we must acknowledge that all the Sentiments held by persons in our Churches cannot be true; and what is not truth must be viewed as "Tares amongst the wheat," which impedes its growth. I firmly believe, were it possible to banish some Sentiments from the Churches, it would remove some obstructions which lie in the way of their Prosperity; But how shall we procure their expulsion, by publishing a Creed at our General Assembly and an Anathema on every one who refuses to subscribe it? God forbid! How shall we that are dead to this Sin live therein? But let us recommend *a Reverence for the word of God*—Let us cultivate *a willing mind to yield to Evidence, of truths above our finite comprehension*, remembering that, in many things it is designed we should here "know but in part." And let us enforce *the necessity of humble prayer to be assisted to understand* "the truth as it is in Jesus," and Oh! that the Divine Spirit may so enlighten our understandings that we may see "Eye

Heb. c. ii. v. 4.

c. vi. v. 2.

Acts viii. 37 38

Mark xvi. 16

Matt. c. xxvi.
27, last clause.Matt. c. xiii.
v. 25.1. Cor. c. xiii.
v. 9.Eph. c. iv.
v. 21.Isaiah c. 52.
v. 8.

to Eye"—that we may "be of one mind:" and that
 II. Cor. c. xiii. v. xi. "the God of love and peace" may be with us.

The SECOND thing, which may appear strange, but which in the nature of things, must hinder the prosperity of Churches, is, Many ministers, *aim almost entirely to inform the Judgment of their hearers on the General Doctrines of the Gospel which they all believe; and on those subjects in which we differ from other Christians.* Now, formal proofs, frequently repeated, of doctrines which hearers firmly believe, including even the Christian Virtues and the Attributes of God, renders a discourse too abstract for strangers who may occasionally attend, and being familiar to those who are constantly there, it fails to arrest their attention any farther, than barely to nod that these things are so. This Preaching is in substance Good Bread; but *good bread* is of itself so dry and unpalatable that, which of you from choice ever makes a meal of it? Nor is it the design of God that man should live by *bread alone* but by every word which proceedeth out of the mouth of God.

This Preaching likewise insensibly begets in the members a propensity to dispute on Religious Subjects (I have seen much of this in my small travels) This soon occasions unbecoming warmth, especially in those who seem to have the weakest side of the question, and it too often engenders Spiritual Pride in the Conqueror.

I am

I am sorry to say, that a disposition to cavil is all the Religion which some professors discover. We know this is often the case in other denominations as well as in ours; but it is not therefore a less evil, because it is common, and it is no reason we should indulge in it because others do. You ought ever to remember that a Disputant and a Christian are two things, for "though I understand all mysteries and all knowledge and have not Love I am nothing." I. Cor. c. xiii.
v. 2.

Our duty as Ministers of Christ, is not only to INFORM THE JUDGMENT BUT TO AFFECT THE HEART. To convince men of their duty is sometimes an easy work, and they will often acknowledge that your remarks are just, when they discover no design of attending to them. They will not dispute the right of God, to command, even while, by their conduct, they claim a right to refuse. They will readily assent to the Gospel as good tidings to poor sinners, while they are no ways concerned to "Lay hold of the hope set before them" in it. Heb. c. vi.
v. 18.

The reason why this is so much the case amongst us is, we do not often enough explain the *purity* and *extent* of the divine Law,—The *Awful Sanction* God hath given unto it—and the *Pains* and *Penalties* which those justly incur who break it in any instance: "For it is written, cursed is every one that continueth not in all things which are written in the Book of the Law to do them"—therefore he that offendeth in one point is *as certainly Guilty* as he that offendeth Gal. c. iii.
v. 10.

James c. ii.
v. 10.

fendeth in many. These are the truths which tend to
 alarm the conscience, and, under the divine Blessing,
 Psalm vii. v. 12 humble the sinner before God "who is angry with the
 wicked every day;" and if we neglect to inform Men
 Rom. iii. v. 12 that "they are all gone out of the way, that " they
 v. 16, are together become unprofitable, that destruction
 Eph. c. ii. v. 3 and misery are in their ways—that " they are
 by nature the children of wrath, even as others"
 Luke xiii. v. 3. and " except they repent they must all Perish,"
 Mark ix. v. 44 "where the worm dieth not and the fire is not
 Quenched:" If we neglect such truths as these, how
 Acts ii. v. 37. can we expect to find our hearers "pricked in their
 and hearts," and crying "what shall we do to be saved!"
 c. xvi. v. 30. Men must know that their souls are dreadfully pol-
 luted by sin and sinking into misery before they will
 Matt. c. viii. v. 25. heartily pray "Lord save or we Perish." They must
 Titus c. iii. v. 5 see the total insufficiency of their own "works of
 Righteousness" to save them, before they will apply
 Heb. c. v. to Christ in earnest for that ETERNAL SALVATION
 which HE IS THE AUTHOR OF." They must be made
 sick, before Christ will make them sound.

Now it is very mortifying to the pride of Men, es-
 pecially of rich men, to be informed that they are
 "Guilty convicts in the sight of God," yet where this
 unpleasant truth is faithfully declared it is sure to
 have some good effect, and it will make Men either
 determined Enemies or, if they feel the power of it,
 firm Friends; and when the rich become *firm friends* to
 Religion: they liberally help to defray the expences
 of

of Publick Worship, and by their Example and their Influence they powerfully encourage the Reign of Righteousness in the Earth. But where these humiliating truths are but seldom or never mentioned : men may profess to espouse the cause which is more flattering to human nature ; But not feeling the importance of divine truth they are destitute of the necessary stimulus to exemplary obedience and generous assistance in the furtherance of the Gospel, for it is from " knowing the terror of the Lord that we are induced to persuade Man." But " ETERNAL JUDGMENT" and the DREADFUL PUNISHMENT of the ungodly in the world to come, are subjects so awful that they sometimes " make a good man pale," therefore they are unpleasant to our Brethren, and on this account we have in the Ministry more " Sons of Consolation" than of " Thunder." Hence it is truly said the Sermons of our Ministers are more likely to comfort the good man than convert the bad ; but, my dear Brethren, how are your places in the Church to be filled when you are in Heaven receiving a gracious reward according to your works of faith and labors of love ? If not filled with persons converted from *darkness to light, from the power of Satan to God* : Are they not likely to remain empty ? And how can we expect them filled with these, if men are not warned in the alarming language of scripture to " FLEE FROM THE WRATH TO COME." Matt. c. iii. v. 7. that they may escape " THE VENGEANCE OF ETERNAL" Jude v. 7. FIRE ?"

A THIRD

A THIRD cause of our not prospering, I humbly conceive to be, our not insisting on *the necessity of a new birth in every soul of man.*

It is truly astonishing that, one who believes the Bible should ever suppose *Reformation and Regeneration* the same thing. Were they the same thing in the estimation of the Prophet Isaiah who, when speaking in the name of God, says, "They seek me daily, and delight to know my ways, as a nation that did righteousness and forsook not the ordinance of their God: they ask of me the ordinances of justice: they take delight in approaching to God:" while in their hearts they were bent on wickedness?

Isai. c. lviii.
v. 2.

Isaiah c. lviii.
v. 4.

Were they the same in the Judgment of an Inspired Apostle; when he speaks of some having the "*form of Godliness*" while they denied the "*power of it*?"

II. Tim. c. iii.
v. v.

Or, Were they the same in our Lord's account when addressing the Scribes and Pharisees he compared them to "whited Sepulchres, which indeed appear beautiful outward, but are within, full of dead men's bones, and all uncleanness. Even so ye also outwardly appear righteous unto men, but within ye are full of Hypocrisy and Iniquity?" Or when he said to the ruler of the Jews that Master of Israel "Ye must be born again?"

Matt. c. xxiii.
v. 27.

v. 28.

John c. iii. v. 7

Ps. lvi. v. 18.

From these instances it appears, that men may be outwardly reformed and yet not relish divine things: but still, "regard Iniquity in their hearts." The Conscience may be alarmed, and the Judgment may, in some things be informed, while yet the bias of the mind

mind remains the same; therefore however desirable a reformation of life may be: this may exist without conversion; but conversion cannot exist without this.

By the New birth I mean a change produced in the mind by the Word and Spirit of God, in consequence of which the Soul is Humble, Contrite and Obedient. We hate Sin—we love the things of God—we see a loveliness in the Divine Being, Infinitely above all Praise—we discern nothing but Free Grace in the plan of Salvation by Jesus Christ—we desire and pray to be convinced of every Sin—to be saved from its power, and Sanctified “wholly, in body, soul and spirit”—Thus the heart is changed from a love of Sin to a love of Holiness—We are “renewed in the spirit. Eph iv. 23. of our minds” and being “created in Christ Jesus unto good works,” our affections are placed on things above. ii. 10. Judge of the importance of this change from the words of our Lord “Verily, Verily, I say unto thee, John iii. 3. Except a man be born again, he cannot See the Kingdom of God.”

A FOURTH cause of our declension is: *we do not often dwell upon the Person—the Work—the Ability and the Love of Christ.*

What glorious ideas will men have of his PERSON when we remind them that it is written of him “Thy Psalm xlv. 6. Throne, O God, is for ever and ever!” and “Let all Heb. i. 6. the Angels of God worship him” who is “Emmanuel Matt. i. 23. God with us!” that “all things were made by him!” John i. 3. that “He upholdeth things by the word of his power!” Heb. i. 3.

D

that

Rev. ii. 23. that "He searcheth the heart of every Member of his
 Rom. xiv. 10. Church!" that "He will judge the world at the last
 Jo. iii. 36. day! and that "He who believeth not the Son shall not
 see life but the wrath of God abideth on him!"

Our hearers will also form Exalted ideas of the
 WORK of Christ as REDEEMER, when we remind them
 Eph. ii. 13. that our Pardon as rebels—the cleansing of our filthy
 Rev. i. souls from the Guilt of Sin—our Justification before
 Rom. v. God—the Purification of our hearts from the Love of
 Heb. ix. 14. Sin—our Freedom at the Throne of Grace, and our
 z. 19. enjoyment of Eternal Life, are, in scripture, ALL at-
 ix. 12. tributed to THE BLOOD OF CHRIST.

And when all these effects are attributed to his
 Blood, what poor Sinner, even under the pressure of
 all his Guilt, can doubt HIS ABILITY to save the most
 polluted Soul, who by repentance and faith applies
 vii. 25. unto him; Especially when he reads that "He is
 able to save them to the uttermost, that come unto
 John vi. 37. God by him," and "Him that cometh unto me I will
 in no wise cast out."

The LOVE of Christ likewise is a powerful truth to
 affect the heart, when pressed home on the conscience
 xii. 41. with warmth—It was manifested in his leaving divine
 II. Cor. viii. Glories to "become poor, that we through his poverty
 9. may be rich;" The apostle John speaks of his love
 John, iii. 16. in the following words: "Hereby perceive we the
 Love of God, because he laid down his life for us."—
 Here is Great Love—GREAT, as we were totally un-
 worthy of it—as great Blessings are procured for us
 by

by it—as it is so extensive; that “He is the propi- I John ii. 2.
 ation not for our Sins only; but also for the Sins of
 the WHOLE WORLD,” and “whosoever believeth on John iii. 16
 him shall not perish but have everlasting Life”—
 Therefore whoever is lost can blame none but him-
 self, for “they will not come unto him, who is over Rom. ix. 5.
 all, God Blessed for ever, that they might have John v. 40.
 life.”

It is by enlarging on, and warmly, and frequently
 recommending these truths to men, that they feel
 the Love of Christ “bear them away to ADMIRA-
 TION, to GRATITUDE, to OBEDIENCE, and TOWARDS
 HEAVEN.”

One of our ministers, in London, told me, (when
 he asked me the question which I am now endeavor-
 ing to answer) that he asked a minister in our con-
 nection the same question, who answered that “as
 it was common for the Churches to despise Jesus
 Christ, HE was determined to despise them.”—To
 what extent this charge may be true I know not: Let
 every man examine himself.

But again, a FIFTH cause of our declension is, we
 do not enough Preach the work of the Holy Spirit in Man's
 Redemption—How can Religion flourish if men are
 unacquainted with the power that produces and pro-
 motes it? If we are not “born of the Spirit as well as iii. 5.
 of water we cannot enter into the Kingdom of God.”

It is the work of the Spirit to reprove the world of xvi. 8.
 Sin. Our Blessed Redeemer declares “he shall glo- v. 14 & 15
 D 2 rify

-rify me; for HE shall take of mine, and shall shew
 it unto you", and that HIS operations on the heart are
 as Beneficial as the Wind that Blows—It is HIS work
 to "renew" the mind—If men obey the truth it is
 through the Spirit"—If we are Sanctified it is by
 "The Spirit of our God"—It is "Through the Spirit
 we learn to mortify the deeds of the Body"—It is
 the work of the Spirit to "bear witness with our
 Spirits" of our spiritual adoption into the family of
 God. And if "The Love of God is shed abroad in
 our hearts," it is "by the Holy Ghost which is given
 unto us," and enables us to see the beauty of the
 Gospel in all its parts, and causeth us to exclaim with
 lively emotions of Gratitude and Joy: "God com-
 mendeth his Love towards us in that while we were
 yet sinners, Christ died for us." It is this Spirit which
 dwelleth in you, Christians; for "Your bodies are
 the Temples of the Holy Ghost."

If men are not taught these things, they will never
 pray "Uphold me by thy free Spirit;" nor will they
 pray to be "Strengthened with might by his Spirit
 in the inner man," and to be daily "led by the
 Spirit." To look for the conversion of sinners to
 God, and for holiness in professors, without the
 Agency of the holy Spirit, is as absurd as to expect
 the Body to live without the Soul; or the return of
 harvest without rain. And to withhold these truths
 from men, is to withhold the only means by which
 they can obey the Gospel and be saved; It is to

"GRIEVE"

"GRIEVE"—to "QUENCH"—to "RESIST"—to "REBEL" against the Holy Spirit : and we must expect he will turn to be the enemy of : and fight against those who do it. Without the work of the Spirit there can be no Religion in our Hearts, and no prosperity in our Churches. But for your encouragement to seek divine aid ; our Blessed Lord hath *not only* declared that your Heavenly Father will certainly "give his Holy Spirit to them that ask him ;" but that he is MUCH MORE ready to give it, than you are to give "good things unto your Children," therefore as Christ said unto the "Multitudes" which attended his Sermon on the Mount, so say I unto you, "Ask, and it shall be given you ; seek, and ye shall find."

Eph. iv. 30.
I. Thes. v.
19.
Acts vii. 51.
Isa. lxiii. 10.

Luke xi. 13. 1

Matt. v. 1.
vii. 7.

A SIXTH cause of our declining state is: *we are too inattentive to the devotional part of Religion, from the mistaken Idea that it Savors of Enthusiasm ;* as though we could love God too much, and obey him too well.

I hope there is not a man or a woman in our Churches who is a stranger to private prayer ; but there is a wide difference between the practice of prayer, merely as a Duty, and delighting in it as a Privilege ; an unfeeling dulness will attend the first, while in the other there will be a fervent desire to conceive aright of the Divine Being ; to feel our unworthiness to appear before him ; an inward lamenting over our Imperfections and Sins ; and an earnest wish to be under the constant influence of the Holy Spirit. It is here the soul labours to feel its wants,
that

Rom. xv. 13.

that it may express them with pious longings before God. Here we reflect with joy on our relation to God in Christ;—plead divine Promises—enjoy their contents, and “Abound in hope, through the power of the Holy Ghost.”

Psalm cxix. 32

The mind, which is thus filled with devotion in private worship, acts upon the same Principles, and pursues the same things, in the House of God.—This makes Religious Services delightful—the soul enjoys its God and Redeemer—enjoys a Heaven within—feeds upon the *Bread of Life* and “runs in the ways of God’s commandments.”

1 Cor. vii. 31.

This enables the Christian to be watchful through every day, and the heart being devoted to God—he uses the world without abusing it; and returns to his closet with the sentiments of the Poet,

“I’m tired with visits, modes and forms,

“And flatteries made to fellow worms,

“Their conversation cloy :

“But I can never have enough

“Of thy best-company, my Lord,

“Thou life of all my joys.

1. John i. 3.

There can be no real prosperity amongst us, unless we labour after Communion with God our Saviour, that we may enjoy daily “fellowship with the Father and with his Son Jesus Christ.”—The enjoyment of this will produce a Heavenly disposition, and as “Christ forgave you” so will you forgive one another; This will remove many weeds from the Garden of God, which—check the growth of Brotherly love—

Col. iii. 13.

bring

bring deadness into the soul—and formality into the Church.

SEVENTHLY; *We do not I fear attend enough to the progress of Religion on the mind, and to the obstructions which Christians in general Experience in their Spiritual Life—*

To be able to speak of a Christian's hopes and fears, joys and doubts, trials and encouragements, from his first becoming serious to his Establishment in Grace; it is needful that our "hearts be well established with Grace," and that we attend to what passes in our own minds.

Heb. xiii. 9.

General descriptions do little good; they make not lasting impression; they may please the ear but not improve the heart. It is by stating particular deliverances in particular circumstances, which we or others have experienced, that goes home to the hearts of those in trouble. For instance, Paul

II. Cor. xii. 7.

was under some particular trial. He earnestly prayed to God for its removal—God answered him "my

v. 9

Grace is sufficient for thee."—Are you in trouble? adopt the same method, nor doubt the same end, "for, no temptation hath taken you but what is common to man, and God is faithful,—who will make a way for our escape, or enable you to bear it." To persons in

I. Cor. x. 13.

trouble these are often "words fitly spoken, and are

Prov. xxv. 11.

like "Apples of Gold in Pictures of Silver."—"Not

I. Cor. ii. 13.

words which man's wisdom teacheth; but which the Holy Ghost teacheth, comparing spiritual things with spiritual."

But this can never be pursued with Effect unless ministers habituate themselves to enquire of the growth

of

Matt. v. 16

of Grace in the souls of their people who likewise must be free and conversant on this subject.—Then will Religion be more in your thoughts, upon your tongues and with your actions.—The happy consequences will be unspeakable Joy in your own Souls, and others “seeing your good works will Glorify your Father which is in Heaven.”

Another thing, which under the divine Blessing will tend much to our prosperity is: *such a love for the Souls of men as will produce an unconquerable Zeal to promote their conversion to God.*—Nothing can be done without divine life and zeal; But does there not prevail in our Churches an almost total indifference in regard to the conversion of Sinners to God?—Doth it not appear as though it were no concern of ours Whether they live or die Eternally?—Are we not even deficient in Zeal for those doctrines which distinguish us from other Societies?—Where is there a denomination so indifferent as we are in this respect?

Now, although a man may have party zeal and yet be totally destitute of love to God and his Neighbour. It is a question worthy your SERIOUS ATTENTION. Whether it be possible for a man to love God and his Neighbour and yet not endeavour that the truths of God may be received and the happiness of Mankind promoted.—Nothing difficult can be effected without Zeal, nothing *spiritually good*, without Zeal and Love to God and precious Souls. These will enable us to encounter obstacles, surmount difficulties, and pursue with perseverance those means which are calculated

lated to convince men of sin,—lead them to Christ and bring them into his fold, where they can “go in and out and find pasture,” and as they “taste that the Lord is Gracious” they will “desire the sincere milk of the word that they may grow thereby.”

John x. 9.

I. Peter ii. 3.

Oh, the value of an immortal soul, which must exist for ever in happiness or Misery! and oh, how unspeakable the reward of those who turn many to Righteousness: “They shall shine as stars for ever and ever!” Let this prospect open your hearts wide, and pour out your purses freely, that no mean either spiritual or temporal may be neglected; but that God may be glorified,—Souls Edified,—and your own comfort and joy promoted in Christ Jesus.

Dan. xii. 3.

Nor let our Sisters in the Lord think they can do nothing but wish well to Zion.—They may be very useful among their acquaintance; and, where Churches are Prosperous there are always some women who by their PRUDENCE, PIETY, and ZEAL, are “helpers” in the Gospel.

Rom. xvi. 3.
Phil. iv. 3.

Once more, it is essential to our enjoying spiritual prosperity in the Church, that we all *wrestle constantly with God in prayer for his Blessing, while we pursue with our whole hearts, the means he hath appointed.*

When we go up to the House of God, let there not, if possible, be a man wanting in all the tribes of Israel.—The smaller our number, the more need have we of the help of every Individual. Let every one put his Shoulder to the work of God, and draw not

E

back,

Psalm cxlv. 19

back, so long as he lives. Let every one act as though the whole work belonged to him and depend on God for the whole power to perform it ; and then we may depend upon it “He will fulfil the desire of them that fear him.”

To sum up the whole, Let us consider our dreadful state as Sinners under the awful curse of the Law: and acquaint ourselves with the PERSON—the WORK—the ABILITY and LOVE of Christ.

Let us not be content with having our Judgments informed on divine things ; but labour so to meditate on their value, that our HEARTS may be INFLAMED FOR GOD.

Let us daily commune with God in Christ, that our hearts may be devoutly engaged in private and public worship.

Col. iii. 2.

Let us scrupulously examine the growth of grace in our souls, that we may know our affections are encreasingly fixed “on things above.”

Let us converse on religious subjects : not for the purpose of cavilling, but with a view of promoting the spread of the Gospel and our own improvement.

Gal. iv. 18.

Acts xx. 28.

Let us reflect on the IMMENSE VALUE of immortal Souls: that we may be “ALWAYS Zealously affected in a good cause,” and thus “Feed the Church of God which he hath purchased with his own Blood.”

Let us be FREQUENT and FERVENT at the throne of Grace, that the Holy Spirit may rest on our hearts, and enable us to use the means with vigour.

In

In one word, "Be watchful and strengthen the things that remain which are ready to die: for I have not found thy works perfect before God." Rev. iii. 2.

"Now the God of peace, that brought again from the dead our Lord Jesus, that great Shepherd of the sheep, through the blood of the everlasting covenant, make you perfect in every good work to do his will, working in you that which is pleasing in his sight, through Jesus Christ; to whom be glory for ever and ever. Amen." Heb. xiii. 20.
31.

FINIS.

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that ye may bring forth much fruit to the glory of the Father
for ever and ever. Amen.



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